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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to increase awareness of the special needs of the Appalachians migrating to Columbus, Ohio. The study revealed that the majority of migrants from Appalachia rapidly became an economically and socially viable force in the community. Many, however, find the move difficult. Their skills are inadequate in a modern technological society, and their rural orientation impedes easy adjustment to urban life. The fact that they have left their homes is a sign of a desire for improvement. It appears that help is needed in the areas of health, housing, education, welfare, employment, law enforcement, religion, and recreation. Suggestions for various kinds of actions are included for each of the foregoing areas. (LS)

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THE APPALACHIAN MIGRANT
IN
COLUMBUS, OHIO

A STUDY FOR THE
JUNIOR LEAGUE OF COLUMBUS
FROM THE COMMUNITY RESEARCH COMMITTEE
OCTOBER 1970

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INTRODUCTION

In October of 1969, the Association of Junior Leagues of America held an Appalachian Seminar in Charleston, West Virginia. The purpose of the seminar was "to increase awareness of Junior League members of the special needs and potentials of the Appalachian region;... and to aid Junior Leagues outside the region in their understanding of Appalachian migrants".¹ The representatives of the Junior League of Columbus brought back information to the League's Community Research Committee and requested that a study be made of the Appalachian migrant in Columbus.

During the progress of this study, approximately 100 people were interviewed; books, articles, and other publications were studied. The study revealed that the majority of migrants from Appalachia rapidly become an economically and socially viable force in the community. Many, however, find the move very difficult. Their skills are inadequate in a modern technological society and their rural orientation impedes easy adjustment to urban life.

The latter group is the focus of this report. Their culture is a traditional one, and as such, resembles "the culture of poverty around the world, including that found in American inner-city areas among both black and white".² But they are a distinct cultural unit with their own mountain heritage.

This cultural heritage is the key to understanding Appalachian families and the resultant difficulties they encounter in adapting their cultural background to a modern urban environment. This report will attempt to shed light on this largely unknown group and on some ways of aiding them to break the cycle of poverty in which they find themselves.

¹Betsy K. McCreight, "Appalachian: October 13, 1969", The Junior League Magazine LV (November/December 1969), p. 9.

²Jack Weller, A Profile of the Appalachian Family, West Virginia University, June 1968, pp. 3-4.

THE APPALACHIAN MIGRANT IN COLUMBUS, OHIO

The Appalachian region encompasses the mountainous portions of Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and Ohio. This is a predominately rural area whose population has been dependent on the land for its livelihood. The Appalachians of today are primarily descendents of the Scotch-Irish who began settling the area shortly after the American Revolution.

The region was a rugged heavily forested wilderness and in order to survive the mountaineer had to be strong and independent. The settlers were forced to scatter themselves sparsely in the narrow valleys and up the steep hollows seeking arable land and good hunting. The poor soil and difficult terrain provided little prosperity for the settlers. Gradually, as the population grew and their needs increased, towns developed. Yet, the towns, for the most part, remained small and served less as urban municipalities than as focal points for the economic, political and educational needs of the surrounding rurally isolated population.

The mountaineers remained economically dependent upon agriculture until the arrival in the late 19th century of lumber and, later, of coal interests. These interests purchased great quantities of land in hopes of developing the resources. The companies brought a new outlook to many: cash payment for land, a cash economy, new jobs, and a new kind of settlement in the form of the coal camp.

The Depression, however, and the later mechanization of the coal mines brought this economy to a halt. Little other industry existed to take up the slack in unemployment. Those people who had employment in these industries were faced with a return to a marginal agricultural existence. The alternative was to migrate out, primarily northward. The 1950's and 1960's have seen ~~these~~ people flow steadily out of the mountains and into the industrial cities.

The Appalachian migrant brings little with him of practical value to his new life. His job skills are few; often his only experience with steady year-round employment is coal mining. His education is poor. Many people have not finished grade school. They find that their education and that of their children is not up to modern standards. Mediocre schools, coupled with the extreme difficulty in attending school during inclement weather, serve as other factors in limiting the scope of their experience.

Houses are often primitive, and without indoor plumbing. Many are inassessible in bad weather.

Medical care in the mountains is sparse. Very few doctors live in these mountain counties and for the isolated mountaineer they are often many hours away. Only in a real emergency can they make the attempt to reach a doctor. Preventive medicine is impossible under such circumstances.

Physical hardship and isolation pervade their lives. Born of these circumstances is a strong sense of independence and self-reliance. One of the few social interactions is the family. The extended family is the principal social relationship and strong family loyalties are developed. The family members feel a dependence on one another and a bond which makes other social interaction seem far less important. Strong emphasis is placed on continuing good relations.

This background, which the Appalachian brings with him to the city, stands in stark contrast to urban culture.

The economic system demands job and educational skills he does not have. The dense pattern of living is difficult to one accustomed to rural isolation. His family is scattered and cannot be turned to in times of need. "Of the many ethnic groups that make up America's cities, few experience the difficulty in becoming 'urbanized' that besets the migrant Southerner. In the city, virtually every principle of his life becomes a rural value struggling to retain its identity against an urban value that demands precedence. It is a cultural struggle: the personal against the impersonal, independence against regimentation."³

Many of the migrants adjust and become assimilated into the community. Many others reach a degree of economic stability, although they never really feel secure and intend always to return "home" at some later time. A third group, our primary concern, is composed of those people who have not found employment, who have found the alien urban culture insurmountable and who live in real poverty.

A master's thesis written on the Appalachian migrant in the city of Columbus, notes several interesting facts from the 105 people that were interviewed. There is still a sizeable migration. Columbus is not selected at random, but is chosen because of its economic opportunities and the people who are already here. The longer the people have lived here, the better adjusted they become, the more they participate in the community. Most of those interviewed are married. Most have large families. The father usually

³Bill Montgomery, "The Uptown Story", Mountain Life and Work, XLIV (September 1968), p. 9.

comes first looking for a job and then brings his family. Most have few occupational skills and therefore low income. They cluster together and tend to form an Appalachian subculture in their area. A majority still return home fairly frequently for visits.⁴

LOCATION Appalachian migrants are drawn to areas where other Appalachians have already settled. Often a family will move in with relatives until it can find a nearby house. Three areas in Columbus are magnets for Appalachian migrants. The South side seems to have the largest concentration. The "bottoms" of the West side, or the area between the Scioto River and the Hilltop, is a second pocket. The third magnet is the near-North side. The migrants are very mobile and move frequently within and among the three areas.

HOUSING One problem for the Appalachian migrant is housing. The low-rental housing is very poor. Houses are apt to be in very bad repair both inside and out. These conditions are coupled with the inexperience of the Appalachians with urban life. The newness of indoor plumbing and refuse collection, crowded living conditions, no place for animals, make adaptation difficult. Then, too, relatives frequently come for extended visits, while they are looking for jobs or housing, and it is not uncommon to have two or three large families living in one small home.

RECOMMENDATION: The areas where the Appalachian migrant settles are under code enforcement housing inspection. Code enforcement should be tightened. "Cities must become increasingly vigilant about the enforcement of housing codes. Can we honestly expect new people in the community to acquire new standards of housing if the city itself is not concerned enough to require compliance with existing housing codes?"⁵

HEALTH Many health problems stem from a lack of knowledge of medicine, nutrition and hygiene. Nutritional problems are prevalent in this group, not only because some foods like wild greens and vegetables from their own gardens are not readily available to the migrants, but also because of lack of money to buy proper foods. Also, the mountaineer has never learned to buy foods, to select and prepare proper foods for nutritional value. A very

⁴Jesus Antonio Rico-Velasco, unpublished master's thesis, "Immigrants from the Appalachian Region to the City of Columbus, Ohio: A Case Study", Ohio State University, 1969.

⁵Donald L. Benedict, The Integration of Southern Appalachian Migrants into Northern Urban Centers, Berea, Kentucky, July 1959, p. 14.

high rate of rejection from the draft among the mountaineers is due to severe health problems. "Children who suffer from protein deficiencies in their early years frequently suffer from higher rates of mental retardation than those with a healthy, well-balanced diet."⁶ Physical defects can also be traced to inadequate diet.

Hygiene, as a preventive measure, is not understood and inadequate housing adds to the difficulties. Tuberculosis and diarrhea are two very prevalent diseases.

RECOMMENDATION: Both cleanliness and nutrition would be improved if classes could be held to teach the women proper home management, budget-buying, food preparation, and personal health. The Appalachian migrants are reluctant to venture far from their homes due to lack of transportation and confidence. Public health nurses and diet aides could be sent into the homes to help teach these women the values of nutrition, cleanliness and safety. These must be people who are readily accepted by the whole group of Appalachians in a neighborhood. Because of their unfamiliarity with many of these concepts, they are suspicious and fearful of those who teach them. A gradual introduction of new methods by those who have their confidence is necessary.

Alcoholism is another major health problem. One cause of drinking is the man's inability to get a job and his consequent loss of status as head of the house. His wife quite often is able to get a job since she may be better educated. He then loses face with the family. "It is likely that alcoholism is more visible in less favored social classes (though incidence is much the same in all classes) and is more likely to be complicated with and by nutritional, employability, and social displacement problems."⁷

A very large percentage of people arrested for intoxication are Appalachian. Since they have no money for bond they are sentenced to the Workhouse. "Over half of the 300 men who go through the Alcoholism Rehabilitation Cottage at the Workhouse were born in Kentucky and West Virginia."⁸

⁶Ralph R. Widner, Lecture: "Appalachia: A Challenge to Citizenship", Pittsburgh, November 6, 1968, p. 3.

⁷Letter to the writer from Arthur Hinchliffe, Director, Columbus Area Council on Alcoholism, Inc., February 9, 1970.

⁸Ibid.

RECOMMENDATION: Criminal procedures are not the way to treat alcoholism in the culturally disadvantaged. The establishment of a detoxification center would be a much more constructive solution to this problem. Such a center would provide for complete treatment and rehabilitation of chronic alcoholics.

Family planning is of great importance. Appalachian people have larger than average families and the family size is a severe economic burden. Planned Parenthood has made great efforts to contact the Appalachian migrant. Its workers have labored to gain the confidence of these people. They not only take on the job of teaching family planning, but work hard to obtain housing, food, employment, and medical aid for these families when they require such help. However, there are many obstacles to overcome: the distrust of strangers, the incomprehension of birth control methods, the lack of understanding of the need to limit families, all of which makes this a group of people who are very difficult to reach.

RECOMMENDATION: Family planning services must keep working toward more personal contact, winning confidence and making facilities more available.

Because of the scarcity of doctors in the mountains the people have had little medical care and even less contact with the ideas of preventive medicine. They customarily seek a doctor only in a crisis. Many migrants come here with severe health problems, caused by lack of knowledge, neglect, or accident. Even during pregnancy a doctor is not seen until just before child birth. A high rate of infant mortality exists in this group. Over half the migrant children who enter the Columbus School System have not been vaccinated against Smallpox. Dental care is lacking in most cases. Mental illnesses, female depression, and chronic disturbance in children are apparent. In many cases the psychological problems can be traced to the sudden change in living pattern from the mountains to the city. A further complication is the high rate of mobility within the community, so that health authorities have an extremely difficult time in keeping track of individual problems.

WELFARE The Appalachian migrant comes to Columbus to improve his economic situation. But when he arrives, he does not always find a job, either because of lack of education, ill health, or a tight job market. Because of his independence and self-reliance, he does not want to seek public aid. If his circumstances become so severe that he is compelled to apply for welfare, his basic needs are not always met.

In April of 1969, Franklin County was forced to end its help to some 4500 persons regarded as eligible for assistance

under the General Relief program, and new cases were turned away. The underemployed, marginally employed, the sick, the handicapped and their families were denied aid. General relief is to provide temporary assistance to those not covered under the regular categories of welfare in emergency situations. Many Appalachian migrants need this temporary assistance. They are generally reluctant to ask for aid. However, when they finally must, and are turned away, what happens? The husband will not go so far as to beg, so he leaves his family and will probably not be heard from again. The wife then turns to churches and other related agencies for help.

RECOMMENDATION: It is beyond the scope of this report to suggest solutions for the welfare problems in this community; however, the elimination of extensive paper work and development of neighborhood offices offering multiple assistance programs are essential in dealing with the Appalachian migrant.

EDUCATION Many difficulties appear in the educational process of Appalachian children.

One large problem is the poor academic background the children bring from Appalachian schools. Almost invariably the children are put back a grade when they enter the Columbus School System. Another difficulty is caused by their mobility. The frequency with which the Appalachian moves means frequent school changes. A child may change schools three or four times in one year.

Absenteeism is another factor. Parents value education but they value equally other factors. The importance of the family unit often prevails over school attendance. An older child may stay home to babysit with younger children. A mother may keep all her children home if she is ill.

One of the biggest impediments to their education is attitude. The parents' sense of inadequacy is conveyed to their children. A parent with a second or third grade education feels ill at ease in the schools. His children, too, feel ill at ease. Their Appalachian speech and poor clothing also set them apart and compound their feelings of inferiority. The economic mobility provided by education is also poorly understood. Taken together, all these factors discourage the rapport needed to bridge the gap between the parents and the schools, and the children and the schools.

Other problems frequently appear. Verbal and speech problems are twice the national average. The lack of a regular

schedule and of reasonable discipline at home mean lack of attentiveness and self-discipline at school.

By the time these children reach 16, many of them drop out of school or have children of their own. Often they are still in junior high, with a poor academic background, no vocational training and only a partial social and cultural adjustment.

The schools have made some real efforts to alleviate the problems of the disadvantaged in Columbus. All inner city schools have a shoe fund. Children in need of clothing are put in touch with Charity Newsies. The junior high schools have medical and dental clinics. These schools require the homeroom teacher to visit the homes of all new pupils. Federally funded enrichment programs have been developed. All schools have visiting teachers.

RECOMMENDATION: Much more could be done. Efforts must be made to make the child's adjustment easier: a more flexible curriculum, more individual attention, perhaps by using para-professionals or tutors, more speech therapy, an Appalachian culture course for students, orientation for teachers in Appalachian culture, more parent involvement in the schools. Also needed are vocational training courses on the junior high level and child care courses for unwed mothers. Many of these suggestions are not exclusively Appalachian aids, but would help all culturally disadvantaged children.

A number of people working with youth also noted the need for a teen center. The teenagers need not only a place where they can meet socially but also a center which would serve as an intermediate stepping stone between their own Appalachian culture and the strange and somewhat alien society which they must soon enter.

EMPLOYMENT The cultural background of the Appalachian again is important in examining his employability. He generally has little academic education, perhaps as high as the eighth grade, but perhaps as low as the third or fourth grade. He has few skills except for mining, and little long term work experience. His frequent week-end visits "back home" may interfere with a regular work schedule. He often only earns enough to keep the family going from day to day, and buying on the installment plan keeps him in debt.

The migrant may make several false starts, before he really catches on and settles down to a job, but when he does he becomes a good employee. Local companies that employ the Appalachian generally feel that he is capable and are enthusiastic

about his abilities. "Most employers find that those who do adjust to the work situation in the city are excellent employees and perform their task with efficiency."⁹ "Once you have broken through this protective attitude and have gained the confidence of the mountaineer, it is possible for him to become a loyal member of the team."¹⁰

Twenty per cent of the men who go to Traveler's Aid are young Appalachians looking for a job. These are sent to spot labor centers. Many of the new arrivals go where their relatives work and are accepted on the good record of their kinfolk. Small companies like shoe factories, mattress factories, and plastic companies are good employers of these people.

RECOMMENDATION: Vocational training for the Appalachian migrant in easily accessible areas is required. The Appalachians must be made aware of the availability of such vocational training centers. The younger people must become better educated. The migrants must learn that several days off from work are a loss to their employer. And, again, red tape and paper work in connection with hiring practices should be reduced wherever possible.

LAW ENFORCEMENT The police department has problems with the Appalachian migrants, but these are not the hard-core crimes that are seen in other groups. As has been mentioned before, alcoholism is a real problem. Domestic disturbances are common, as is school truancy. Gambling is also a problem, but this consists of card games, rather than the big-time gambling. One of the biggest problems to the police is junk automobiles which are abandoned after they have brought the migrant to Columbus.

The department has recently started using Community Service officers in the inner city areas. These policemen make direct contact with the people in their assigned areas and are on call at anytime to aid the people. These men usually work out of the settlement houses. They are gradually gaining the confidence of the people.

RELIGION Churches in the area are generally the kind that are set up in a vacant store. The religion is evangelical and pentecostal, fundamental in its interpretation of the Bible. The minister is self-ordained, usually one who has a job during the

⁹Donald L. Benedict, The Integration of Southern Appalachian Migrants into Northern Urban Centers, Berea, Kentucky, July 1959, p. 10.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 2.

week, and preaches on Sunday. The recent migrants prefer to go to these store-front churches, because they feel more at home in smaller, less formal groups. The more established city church is a sign of modernism and loses its personal attraction to these people.

RECOMMENDATION: These small churches, which appear and disappear quite rapidly are a vehicle for contact with the Appalachian migrant and can be quite important in any further work with them.

RECREATION The settlement houses, recreation centers, and the larger churches in the areas where the Appalachians are located have made real efforts to contact these people. They try to provide recreation for the young and old alike. They provide emergency help, pre-schools, and youth groups. They have work programs in which the youths go out to clean up neighborhoods in the summertime. They provide self-betterment courses like charm courses, courses in nutrition, and sewing classes. One settlement house, Godman Guild, had a "Hill Festival" which was very successful. The Appalachians provided their own type of food, music and entertainment. This same settlement house has a Mothers' Club of Appalachian women who try to help each other and the needy of their own community. Among other activities, they gather used clothing, sort and mark it, and run a shop four days a week for neighbors who need such items. This project has been very successful and worthwhile. In many instances, however, these activities have been only moderately successful.

RECOMMENDATION: Settlement houses and other groups should employ and make use of the Appalachian people who are capable and can make better contact. More day care nurseries are needed for those mothers who work and more recreation facilities for all ages. However, there must be more encouragement to use these facilities.

FURTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR HELP These Appalachian people are trying to better themselves. The very fact that they left their beloved hills is a sign of a desire to improve their lot. They, like their more successful brothers, could contribute much to the stability of the community. But these people need help in adjusting to urban life. Some suggestions for various kinds of action have been mentioned earlier in this study, and a few more should be pointed out now.

In laying the ground work for action, a great deal of personal effort must be made. People must learn to understand the Appalachian migrant and his ways. Books like Yesterday's People by Jack Weller, which imparts a sensitive feeling for and knowledge of these people provide helpful background material.

The workers must learn to listen to the Appalachian. Not only is his language often quite different, but he leaves much unsaid. The worker must also work with these people on a one to one basis, so that he can gain their confidence and then be accepted by the group. This will take much visiting, many cups of coffee and a great deal of time. Agencies must learn to send their staff out to the homes of these people, for the Appalachians are very reluctant to go to an agency. And once the contact has been made and confidence is built up, and there is hope that the migrant will venture forth to an agency or clinic, invitations must be repeated over and over, so that the migrant will feel that he is wanted, and that people are truly taking an interest in him.

Another way to reach the Appalachian migrant, and make him aware of services and training programs that are available to him is the news media. He listens a great deal to the local "country and western" radio stations. He is particularly interested when a point is made either through poetry or music. One city was very anxious to appeal to the migrant during the drive for polio immunization. They made good contact by using poetic jingles in the local newspapers, but particularly poems and singing "commercials" on the radio. Another city has billboards placed strategically along the highways into the city leading from the South. These billboards advertise agencies and services that are available to the Appalachian migrant. Flyers, passed around in the neighborhood, are another method of contact.

Chicago has made two outstanding efforts to help Appalachian migrants. They have a Chicago Southern Center, "a private, non-profit organization that attempts to provide 'instant stability' for migrants".¹¹ They try to keep the recent migrant from freezing or starving on the street. They also have programs in sewing and guitar instruction, sessions on homemaking, and recreational activities for all ages.

In connection with the Chicago Southern Center, a Catholic Father has started an "Outreach" program. "Outreach is designed to turn a 30-block area in Uptown into 30 one-block communities, the citizens of each block working to solve the problems of the block as a whole rather than being concerned only with their own."¹² Father Dunne tries to get five volunteers from each block "to coordinate individual efforts and foster a

¹¹Bill Montgomery, "The Uptown Story", Mountain Life and Work XLIV (September 1968), p. 12.

¹²Ibid., p. 14.

sense of community involvement".¹³ One person learns about the agencies in the area and is able to refer his block members to them. Another welcomes newcomers into the block and gives them information. A third block leader organizes clean-up groups for the area. A fourth promotes recreational activities within the block. The fifth person oversees all the activities in the block. This requires much door-knocking and street-walking, but is most helpful to the neighborhoods and gives responsibility to the migrants themselves. It is very important to train the Appalachians themselves to work together, for this is the kind of outreach that gets to the people.

Columbus could have an Appalachian Culture Center or Centers in the neighborhoods of the Appalachian migrants. They should be "culture" centers because their music, art and crafts are something that the mountain people are very proud of. To encourage this pride in their heritage will build a self-identity and self-esteem which is so badly needed. Such centers would be central contact points where the new migrant could find out about employment, housing, credit, welfare, and the many other new problems that confront him. Clinics such as well-baby, pre-natal and Planned Parenthood could be located here so that the migrant could take advantage of the central location. Of course, much spade-work would have to be done to win the confidence and support of the people in the neighborhood. Simplicity would be an important ingredient to the success of these centers. "The success of the community improvement efforts (necessitates) a modification of the rigid, structural requirements usually imposed by agencies and organizations seeking to work with the disadvantaged."¹⁴

In summary, other great needs of the Appalachian migrant are better housing and housing inspection, more sympathetic and understanding teachers and teaching methods, more education and better facilities in health and nutrition, better vocational training and better job opportunities. The Junior League of Columbus feels that the first important step towards fulfillment of all these needs is to educate the community, to make the community more understanding of the problems confronting the Appalachian migrant moving from a rural to an urban life, and to make the community aware of the potential of the Appalachian to become a responsible citizen.

¹³"Migrants Still Have 'Mountain' Barriers", Appalachian Advance, III (October 1968), p. 11.

¹⁴Thomas E. Woodall, Design for Action, Morgantown, Appalachian Center, West Virginia University, (October 1968), p. 11.

Appalachians living in the city can adapt to urban life and still maintain those portions of their cultural heritage which are valuable to them. In helping them, we must not inflict our own values as their background is important to their basic living pattern. We must learn about these people in order to understand them better. In fact, there are many things that we can learn from them. They have a deep feeling of belonging and loyalty. They take time to get to know people on an individual basis. They take time to enjoy life. They are not pressed by the busy world around them. As Jack Weller suggests "perhaps the mountaineer will be more ready to enter the cybernetic age than those who are deeply enmeshed in the industrial age. ...It may well be that the mountaineer will already have the concept of life and work fit for the new age".¹⁵

¹⁵Jack Weller, Yesterday's People, Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1966, p. 160.

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